



Adopted: May 18, 2002

National Assessment Governing Board

Public Access to Test Questions, Item Release, and Confidentiality of Data for the National Assessment of Educational Progress

Policy Statement

INTRODUCTION

As the Nation's Report Card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is an on-going, Congressionally-authorized project to collect data through surveys on the academic knowledge and skills of American students. Its primary goal is to report fair and accurate information on student achievement in reading, mathematics, and other subjects taught in elementary and secondary schools.

Since its inception, the National Assessment has administered both cognitive test questions and background questionnaires. The test questions assess student knowledge and skills in academic subject areas. The background questionnaires provide information for reporting categories and collect non-cognitive data, related to achievement, on students, their family background, teachers, and schools.

By statute (P.L. 107-110), "the public shall have access to all assessment data, questions, and complete and current assessment instruments" of the National Assessment with two important exceptions:

- (a) "Personally identifiable" information about individual students, their families, and schools must remain confidential in accordance with the Federal Privacy Act (Sec. 552a of Title 5, U.S. Code), and
- (b) Access to cognitive questions may be restricted to maintain security if such questions are to be reused, and breaches of security are punishable as a felony.

To fulfill the first requirement, NAEP has made sure since its inception that no information on individual students or schools is included in its data releases or reports.

As part of its administration procedures, the names of students who have taken NAEP never leave the school building in which the assessment is given.

Although test questions may be kept secure, a substantial number of questions are released after each assessment in order to aid public understanding of the exam. In addition, under the statute, all secure cognitive questions must be made available within 45 days after a written request “in a secure setting that is convenient to both parties.” Local school districts must make “reasonable efforts” to inform parents and others about the access provided under law.

By statute, NAEP may “only collect information that is directly related to the appraisal of academic achievement, and to the fair and accurate presentation of such information.”

The National Assessment is conducted by the Commissioner of Education Statistics under the policy guidance of the National Assessment Governing Board. The Board’s areas of responsibility include the assessment methodology; guidelines for reporting and dissemination; and “appropriate actions needed to improve the form, content, use, and reporting” of the National Assessment.

To carry out these responsibilities, the Board hereby adopts guiding principles, policies, and procedures for public access to test questions, item release, and confidentiality of data for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The policy shall be implemented in a manner that promotes wide public confidence in the integrity and appropriateness of NAEP questions and in the absolute confidentiality of all individual data obtained.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. By law, all questions and instruments of the National Assessment shall be accessible to the public, consistent with security considerations which pertain to test items that may be reused. The procedures for public access shall be user-friendly and designed to make the assessment as open to the public as possible.
2. Since security considerations do not apply, all background questionnaires shall be readily available to parents, state and local officials, and interested members of the public. Such questionnaires shall be available before field tests and operational use or at any other time members of the public wish to obtain them.
3. After each assessment, a substantial number of test questions shall be made publicly available with performance data to provide concrete examples of NAEP contents and results. Released items shall be widely distributed to promote public understanding of the National Assessment.

4. As required by law, within 45 days of a written request, all NAEP test questions shall be available for public inspection, consistent with requirements for test security. Any breach of security is punishable as a felony.
5. All information collected by NAEP about individual students and schools shall remain strictly confidential. The names of students who have taken NAEP shall not leave the school building in which the assessment is administered.
6. The Governing Board shall monitor the implementation of this policy. The Board shall review all procedures regarding public access and confidentiality of NAEP, which are established by the National Center for Education Statistics.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

1. NCES and its contractors shall assist school districts in informing parents and members of the public about the National Assessment. Special efforts shall be made to inform parents about the content, survey methodology, and uses of the assessment. Background questionnaires and released cognitive test items shall be available at schools participating in NAEP samples. Districts shall be given information about public access to current assessment questions and instruments, provided test security is maintained.

2. Background questionnaires shall be sent promptly to anyone wishing to obtain them and shall be posted on the Internet, accompanied by explanations and rationales.

3. Following each administration of the National Assessment, approximately 25 percent or more of the test questions shall be made public at the same time as the initial release of test results. These items shall illustrate the range of item types, difficulty levels, and content covered in the assessment, and shall also be useful as exemplars of achievement levels. Items shall be accompanied by performance data. A selection of released items shall be available in NAEP reports and information booklets. All released items shall be posted on the Internet.

4. Procedures shall be developed for the examination of secure NAEP items by members of the public within 45 days of a written request, provided test security is maintained. Efforts shall be made to permit such examination promptly within the state of persons making such a request. As provided by law, the review must take place in a secure setting, such as the offices of a state or local education agency that is convenient to both parties.

5. Detailed procedures shall be established to ensure the confidentiality of all information obtained by NAEP about individual students and schools in accordance with

provisions of the Federal Privacy Act (Section 552a of Title 5, U.S. Code). No names of students who have taken the assessment shall leave the school building. No records shall be maintained by NCES or its contractors containing personally identifiable information about individual students and their families. These guarantees of privacy shall be mentioned in NAEP publications and reports, and details regarding their implementation shall be made available upon request.